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## Career Opportunities for Diverse Women in South Africa with Special Reference to Aviation: Life Orientation Perspectives

### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore career opportunities for diverse women in South Africa with special reference to aviation. Little has been done on this focus due to its complexities and that after 20 years of South African democracy; female skill shortage in the aviation industry is still not addressed. The researcher utilized a qualitative approach. Mason (2002) argues that a qualitative approach is grounded in philosophy and is largely concerned about how the social world is interpreted and understood. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological system theory is used in this study as a relevant theoretical framework. This study seeks to understand career opportunities for diverse women in South Africa with special reference to aviation. The study also emphasizes the role of the subject Life Orientation in making people aware of career opportunities. Findings from this study showed that the relative lack of diverse women in the South African aviation sector is not an excuse because the South African government has given us opportunities to explore this field. On this note, it is recommended that more career awareness and bursaries be made available to the ideal candidates and that aviation industries should make piloting more attractive to women.

Keywords: diverse women, aviation, career opportunities, South Africa and Life Orientation

### Introduction

Aviation is an industry that is not widely explored in South Africa especially with women as pilots, yet it plays an important role in the country's international, national and domestic economy. Twenty years into South African democracy, diverse women, for that matter young women (White and African) are still not occupying better positions such as flying airplanes as pilots and aviators. This is still dominated by white males, because of imbalances created by apartheid prior 1994. This has led to the exclusion of certain people, including diverse women in the country or societies. Furthermore, gender stereotypes, media programmes as well as motivational materials where only men are portrayed often as pilots, also contributed to this exclusion. This might lead to girls and women thinking that the aviation field industry is exclusively designed for men only. In other words, transformation in the aviation industry is still a challenge, as there are still too few women who occupy highly skilled positions in that regard as compared to their male counterparts even after more than 20 years of freedom and democracy in South Africa (SA).

### **Literature reviews and problem statement and context of this study**

According to the statistics compiled, a total of 57 women are pilots. Women pilots' representation is less than six percent of the worldwide pilot population (Mitchell et al., 2006). To support the above point, (Jackson & Joshi, 2004) found that women were rated less competent and less likely to be selected as leaders when groups were brought together on a diversity-related rationale. Ison (2010) further states that women have been underrepresented in sciences, technology engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. This underrepresentation of women in the STEM fields cannot be balanced overnight but hope for future rise in women in aviation should be encouraged.

From the above researchers' discussions and findings on this topic, as a researcher it is evident that empowering and educating women focusing on diverse career opportunities is important especially in the aviation industries, if South Africa wants to acknowledge both affirmative action and equal employment opportunities as stated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996). If this is not respected and achieved, lack of people's awareness of career opportunities such as aviation can still contribute towards the inequalities of diverse women employment especially with reference to aviation. It is further stated that 89% of the country's pilots are white with 11% blacks only as well as only 8 qualified flight procedure designers in the country (South African Civil Aviation Authority, 2014). This really shows that SA is still having a long way to go in reaching gender equality with regard to aviation as a career opportunity. Westover (2010) supports the above statement by mentioning that there is a large cross-disciplinary research literature on gender and work, and it continues to grow. From this context, one can thus argue that an ongoing point of debate is still on gender-specific expectations and stereotypes, gender segregation in work and occupations.

Most blacks are occupying cabin crew positions. These types of disparities are caused by skills shortages experienced by previously disadvantaged communities (Khoza, 2014). The second cause is that certain courses such as aviation are very expensive. For example, an 18 months aviation course can cost up to R3000 000 in SA. This amount of money is too much for a black disadvantaged South African and thus cannot afford to get an opportunity to pursue a career in aviation. This is really unfair and therefore personally refuse to say, historically disadvantaged individuals stretch only as far as for instance being a cabin crew, as statistics have indicated a high intake in that category. Even though the government is given a credit in as far as spending money on training is concerned, there is still little change as this aviation is still nowhere near transformation after 20 years of democracy. This is supported by the Aviation figures on Table 1 on next page.

### **The concept of diversity in this study**

There is a widely held misconception about diversity, that people think it is static. In this study diversity especially within a workplace is defined as any mixture of components characterized by similarities and differences. The components of a diversity mixture include differences and similarities between and among races, ages, genders, educational levels, religious affiliations, geographical origins, and work styles. Study conducted by Johnston and Packer (1987), regards diversity as significant changes in the composition of the workforce such as the increasing number of women, racial minorities,

senior workers, and immigrants. The definitions above can be further explained by viewing diversity as consisting of humans who differ from one another along any number of dimensions (e.g., race, gender, values, personality, education, experience, sexual orientation, and religion). This is not the case in this article as it will teach the readers to know and understand that diversity's complexities have been at a center of debate in South Africa. Achieving it remains a challenge because of South Africa's complex political, geographic and socio-economic factors. To support the preceding statement, Bendick (2018) adds by saying that the tendency to base decisions on stereotypes is strong when decisions are made. This implies that we should not postpone doing more research and seek solutions on how diversity can be enhanced and achieved. We should strengthen an awareness of diversity by shifting away from the traditional view where certain job opportunities are suitable for males at the expense of females (Banks, 2001). In this context this means that diversity at the workplace should also acknowledge the employment of women especially in aviation industries where there is still prevalence of male domination.

*Table 1: Aviation figures*

|         | South African Air Ways |        | SA   |        | Comair |        |
|---------|------------------------|--------|------|--------|--------|--------|
|         | male                   | female | male | female | male   | female |
| African | 55                     | 4      | 21   | 11     | 2      | 0      |
| Colored | 27                     | 2      | 3    | 1      | 4      | 1      |
| Indian  | 42                     | 4      | 7    | 1      | 4      | 1      |
| White   | 582                    | 62     | 181  | 20     | 183    | 12     |
| Total   | 706                    | 72     | 212  | 33     | 193    | 14     |

Sources: Modified table from sources SAA, SA express and Comair 2013 as taken from Sowetan newspaper, p. 9, Tuesday, 24 June 2014. Sowetan is a local newspaper in South Africa.

### **The role of Life Orientation in making people aware of career opportunities**

Before 1994 the subjects of School Guidance, Physical Education, Religious Education and Moral Education were offered at South African schools. However, in the early nineties these subjects were merged, and a new subject called Life Orientation was formed because of the new democracy in South Africa and the rationalization process that was taking place in education. Life Orientation as a new subject was introduced into the primary and high school curriculum in 1997 and was then revised in 2002. This was part of the process of restructuring the education system in line with a nonracist, democratic South Africa (DoE, 2004). Life Orientation includes five learning outcomes: health promotion, social development, personal development, physical development and movement, and orientation to the world of work, thus effectively replacing the pre-1994 subjects of School Guidance, Physical Education and Religious Education. On this note, this new subject Life Orientation provides an appropriate platform to promote an awareness of orientation to the world of work. Teaching Life Orientation, focusing on

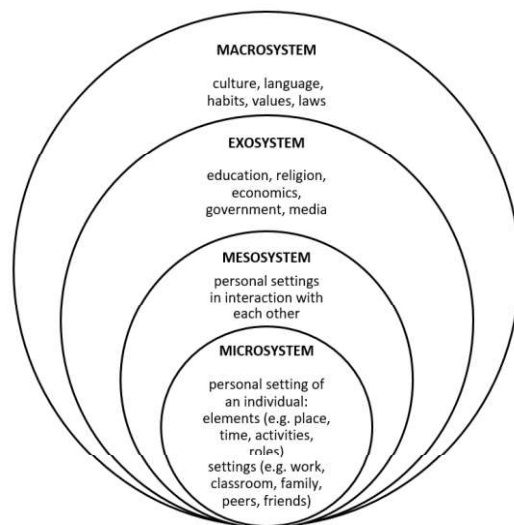
the world of work (career and career choices) as a unit in the curriculum is thus significant since through it, students especially female students can be aware of diverse career paths to follow including aviation. On this note, it is important to show students, female students in particular, that orientation to the world of work is inevitable and important, as this will enhance both their self-esteem and confidence in their career path of aviation. World of work focuses on sub-topics such as career choices, subject choices, an individual's strengths and weaknesses, abilities and interests, decision making skills, work environment and duration of study as well as study information (DoE, 2007). This means that as teachers we should try by all means to focus more on this subtopic of the world at work in order to make female students aware of this career. This will thus bring into picture diversity in aviation as a career.

### Theoretical framework

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological system theory is therefore relevant to this study and its relevance is seen when as a lecturer and researcher has realized that the systems permeate and interact with one another in order to bring into picture that balance. For example, if students are taught and exposed right from home (macro-system) to school and university level (micro-system) to variety of career opportunities such as aviation, it will be easy for most of female students or women to know that they too can attempt to pursue such career paths at higher education institutions and colleges (meso-system), resulting in them working with their male counterparts in the communities (macro-system).

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological system theory is very important and relevant in this study because it focuses on the interrelated systems such as the family, school and society/community (Egan & Cowan, 1979). See Figure 1 below:

Figure 1. Ecological System Model



Source: Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological system model in Egan & Cowan, 1979, p. 82.

It can therefore once more be emphasized that the preceding theoretical framework is relevant to this study, because we are in the currently ever changing society (chronosystem) that needs an inclusion of both males and females and others in the workplace. It is imperative that the continuing inequities are eradicated to bring into picture equality and equity, and that the process through which the learner, educator and professional support service population becomes representative of the South African population, is accelerated (DoE, 2001). In other words, there should be no segregation in any institution in as far as teaching, learning, training and employability of workers are concerned as well as admission of male and female students into career paths such as aviation.

## **The study**

### *Research question*

Based on the preceding section, the research question from this study is thus stated as: How can diverse women in South Africa be made aware of aviation as a career opportunity?

### *Aim*

The aim of this study is to: Describe and explore aviation as a career opportunity to the South African diverse women.

### *Limitations of the study*

Firstly, this study is theoretically based on the review of literature and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and cannot be generalized to a broader population more so that it is solely conducted in South African contexts. Secondly, it is also focusing on the South African diverse women from Life Orientation perspective, and therefore cannot be generalized to other cases or similar situations.

### *Findings*

From a theoretical stance, it was found that women are still in minority as far as aviation in South Africa is concerned. This is supported by literature discussed in the previous sections, for example, women pilots' representation is less than six percent of the worldwide pilot population (Mitchell et al., 2006). On this note, there is a need to further conduct research on this topic of women in aviation.

## **Recommendations for future research**

Based on the preceding discussion, it can be recommended that:

- The South African government and the National Department of Education should intervene in that regard by starting to see the significance of transforming the industries and also building aviation colleges in all the provinces.
- More bursaries be made available to those women who want to pursue their careers in aviation.
- The aviation industry should make piloting more attractive to women and be taught as a module/course and not as a unit in the curriculum of South African schools and universities.

### **Ethical consideration**

In order to uphold ethical considerations of the study, to start with, I will first apply for ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of Johannesburg. As soon as the ethics committee grants the approval to conduct the research, I will apply for permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research from schools under its jurisdiction. After permission is granted by the department, the consent of the school and individual teachers that will be participating in the study will be sought. The participants will not feel threatened or intimidated and will not be pressurized to answer any specific question on a matter that they might regard as confidential. Participation will be made voluntary and optional. Participants will be informed beforehand that they may withdraw at any stage during the discussions. Precautionary measures will be taken to ensure that participants will not feel upset or uncomfortable and that their right to privacy or dignity will not be infringed upon during the interviews. I will inform participants that their participation in the study is voluntary and that they could withdraw should they feel uncomfortable with the study at any time without penalty. I will protect the privacy of the participants by means of the use of pseudonyms for the participants. The interviews will not be conducted during teaching and learning activities, a convenient time and place will be used for the interview. All participants and schools will remain anonymous in the analysis and the reports arising from the research.

### **Conclusion**

This study has added more insightful awareness of the importance of aviation in South Africa where women are still in minority as far as aviation is concerned. On this note, it can be concluded that diverse females are still in minority as far as employment in aviation is concerned. The researcher is therefore of the opinion that if the subject of Life Orientation's main topics such as Career and Career choices can be taught thoroughly and seriously in schools and universities in South Africa, this can assist learners and students to be aware of more diverse career paths to follow including aviation. The reason why the researcher is mentioning the above point, is because Life Orientation at this moment is not seriously taught at schools.

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